

*Water Resources Center  
College of Natural Resources  
College of Agricultural, Food,  
and Environmental Sciences  
University of Minnesota  
Extension Service*

*Room 173 McNeal Hall  
1985 Buford Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
612-624-9282  
612-625-2282  
Fax: 612-625-1263*

## **Comments for the CSREES Listening Session**

Bloomington, Minnesota, July 26, 2001

by Les Everett

Program Coordinator, Water Resources Center, University of Minnesota

### **Topic: Interagency Natural Resource Conservation Education**

Summary: Interagency natural resource conservation education programs funded through EQIP Education Assistance and Clean Water Act Section 319 grants have been very successful in Minnesota. Increased attention by CSREES is needed to assure the survival and enhancement of EQIP Education Assistance (or similar programs) currently and into the next farm bill.

1. Natural resource conservation in agricultural areas is essential both for the public good and for the future of agricultural production. Areas of concern include:

- Groundwater water contamination by nitrates.
- Hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico resulting from nitrate delivered to rivers by drainage tile in the Mississippi River Basin.
- Lake and river eutrophication from excess phosphorus agricultural field runoff.
- Contamination of surface water from fecal-borne pathogens.
- Soil loss from farm fields resulting in decreased soil productivity and sedimentation of lakes and rivers.

2. These problems are most effectively addressed with a combination of education, incentive, and regulatory programs. Education is essential in presenting the resource problem and recommended practices with understandable language and through a mix of education methods.

3. If the different agencies with the tasks of education, technical assistance, incentive programs, and regulation do not cooperate and coordinate, the farmer receives mixed and sometimes conflicting messages. Tillage, crop nutrient, and manure management are examples of areas where confusion often occurs if there is not interagency cooperation. It is not sufficient to simply publish practice standards for nutrient management and similar farmer-implemented practices in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide, or publish feedlot rules in the Federal Register. A well-designed and delivered education program is essential to allow the farmer to understand and carry out these practices.





4. It is our experience in Minnesota that interagency teamwork is greatly facilitated by funding that is dedicated to interagency education projects. A good example is EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) Education Assistance, where NRCS, UM Extension, and state agencies jointly develop and deliver conservation education related to practices addressed under EQIP Financial Assistance. This contractually based program with specified deliverables has been successfully delivering regional education programs on nutrient, manure, tillage, and grazing management since 1998. The program has also funded 62 county and watershed based conservation education proposals in the state, focusing on local resource issues. We have had similar success with an EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 grant on feedlot rules education in bringing several agencies together to develop and deliver education about manure and feedlot management.

5. EQIP Education, or a similar program, needs the advocacy support of CSREES, representing Extension, in discussions with NRCS, FSA, and OMB. At the urging of FSA, OMB recently slashed EQIP Education Assistance in half at the national level. It was already small at \$4 million nationwide, and now is becoming so small as to be unusable at the state level. We need CSREES to take an active role in reinstating and enhancing EQIP Education, both in the current fiscal year, and in the new farm bill. We also need CSREES to encourage other states to take this highly productive approach with multi-agency conservation education programs. A better knowledge of other states of the potential of EQIP Education programs would lead to a critical mass of support.

6. I am attaching a copy of a previous letter sent to CSREES on this topic, along with an EQIP Education progress report, a brochure on the local education program, and an example of two recent publications by the project. The EQIP Education web site for Minnesota is: [wrc.coafes.umn.edu/EQIP](http://wrc.coafes.umn.edu/EQIP)



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Mary Ann Rozum  
Natural Resources & Environment  
USDA-CSREES  
800 9<sup>th</sup> St. SW  
Rm 3700 Waterfront Center  
Washington, D.C. 20024

June 29, 2001

Greetings Mary Ann,

We would like to bring to your attention an issue of importance to the University of Minnesota Extension Service. We have been involved in a cooperative program of EQIP Education with NRCS for the past four years. This has been highly successful and valuable to producers. Recent actions by OMB have put this program in jeopardy. We would like your assistance to highlight these program successes so the education funds can be reinstated in the future. We would also like your assistance in making the case that this type of provision needs to be included in the next Farm Bill.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) of the 1996 Farm Bill made a first step in making education part of federal conservation programs. As conservation practices supported by financial assistance moved beyond structures like terraces and waterways to farmer-based management practices like crop nutrient and manure management planning, it was recognized that simply publishing standards in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide was not going to get the job done. The farmer needs to receive adequate information in an understandable form for implementation of the practice.

It is widely assumed that the roles of education, technical assistance, and financial assistance are clear. Extension does education, NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation Districts do technical assistance, and FSA does financial administration. In the absence of a common program, however, separate organizations have separate agendas. The priority practices in a USDA program may not be those emphasized by a university-based Extension service. The messages received by the farmer from different organizations working separately are often not in concert, resulting in confusion for the farmer and agricultural professionals.





EQIP provided NRCS State Conservationists the opportunity to put up to 5% of the program funds into education assistance. In a few states, including Minnesota, this option was used to develop a very effective joint Extension-NRCS-state agency education partnership. The program in Minnesota is contractually based, with clearly defined deliverables that are paid after completion. Education materials are developed and workshops are delivered by joint Extension and NRCS teams, with assistance from other state agencies, including the state Board of Water and Soil Resources and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. County and watershed based education projects are also funded and given technical support by the state program. Overall financial and staff support is contributed by NRCS, Extension, and state agencies.

The statewide program in Minnesota emphasizes crop nutrient, manure, and grazing management. Publications in these areas, as well as computer software for crop and manure management planning have resulted from the team effort. Workshops and on-farm demonstrations continue to be held around the state for farmers and agricultural professionals. The result has been a unified message to the agricultural community about priority conservation practices.

The program has also facilitated 62 local education projects on locally determined conservation priority topics. The local education program is described in the enclosed brochure titled "Locally Led Conservation Education". The complete EQIP Education program in Minnesota is described at the web address <http://wrc.coafes.umn.edu/EQIP/>.

Unfortunately, FSA opposition to EQIP at the national level has led to OMB ordering a 50% cut of EQIP Education Assistance funding for fiscal year 2001. The result of this decision, if allowed to stand, will be to end the productive NRCS-Extension partnership in Minnesota on conservation education. A key staff position in the team will be lost, and other Extension staff will have to be reassigned to other agricultural production education duties. We believe that EQIP Education is a model program that should be adopted across the country, not one that should be ended after proving so successful in Minnesota.

We have enclosed copies of two of the education products (Grazing Systems Planning Guide, and Low-Cost Conservation Practices brochure) produced by the statewide program along with the local education program brochure mentioned above. The Crop Nutrient Planning and Manure Management training guide, and nutrient management software are available on demand, but are not enclosed here because of size. We have also enclosed copies of a project progress summary sheet.



Please let us know how we can be of assistance in reversing the ill-advised decision of OMB for the 2001 budget and in ensuring the continuation and expansion of EQIP Education in the new Farm Bill. Developing a strong education partnership among Extension, NRCS, and state and local organizations, cemented with a common program like EQIP Education, is the best approach to ensuring the delivery of a unified message on conservation practices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James L. Anderson".

James L. Anderson, Director  
University of Minnesota Water Resources Center

cc: Charles Casey, Dean and Director, UM Extension

encl:

Minnesota EQIP Education, Summary of Progress  
Locally Led Conservation Education  
Low-Cost Conservation Practices  
Grazing Systems Planning Guide



## **Minnesota EQIP Education Summary of Progress, June 2001**

The University of Minnesota Extension Service and USDA-NRCS in Minnesota entered into the first of four annual agreements in September 1997, to provide education for the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Financing is through NRCS EQIP Education Assistance, matched with funds and staff time from UM Extension and the UM College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences. The state Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) are participating through funding of four Extension and Extension-affiliated positions.

### **This collaboration includes:**

1. Regional workshops for agricultural producers and professionals.

Progress: Five workshops were completed by January, 1999 on nutrient and manure management planning, with a total of 430 participants.

2. Development of workshop education guides for nutrient, grazing, and pest management planning.

#### Progress:

- The nutrient management education guide/slide set has been completed and was distributed in November, 1999.
- Nutrient management software has been designed, programmed, tested, and released to key users. It was introduced to agency staff in four regional meetings in August, 2000 and is being revised for re-release in September 2001.
- A guide to integrated weed management was purchased from the University of Wisconsin and modified for Minnesota. Copies were distributed to Extension and NRCS/SWCD staff in December, 1999.
- The grazing management planning guide was completed in October, 2000, and is being distributed at grazing management workshops for producers in 2001.
- A livestock watering system demonstration module for intensively managed grazing was prepared in 2001 and is being used at producer workshops throughout the state.

3. Coordination and augmentation of ongoing Extension and related workshops on nutrient, manure, tillage, and grazing management.

Progress: Regional EQIP Education Coordinators are helping organize and deliver regional and local education programs in these subject areas.

4. Administer education grants to Local Work Groups on a competitive basis.

Progress: Three rounds of competitive grant awards have been made, the first for 26 proposals totaling \$178,665 (FY 97 and FY98 funds), the second for 13 proposals totaling \$97,970 (FY 98 funds), and the third for 15 proposals totaling



\$106,476 (FY99 funds). \$54,800 (FY99 funds) was also awarded to EQIP Conservation Priority Area (CPA) Local Work Groups, based on education proposals submitted with CPA applications. Regional EQIP Education Coordinators and other Extension staff assisted Local Work Groups with education activities related to these grants. The local education grant program is described in the brochure "Locally Led Conservation Education".

5. Organize three pilot regional teams to review the quality of producer EQIP plans that focus on nutrient management – waste utilization and prescribed grazing. Final reports will be used to improve the planning and implementation of these conservation practices through educational workshops.

Progress: The pilot teams for manure/nutrient management plan reviews in southeast and north central Minnesota completed their work and issued a final report. Based on these results education emphasis should be placed on planning for management of sensitive field areas and best management practices in applying nutrients. The pilot team for grazing management plan reviews reported that grazing plans were weak in most components and therefore requires a comprehensive education program for plan preparation.

6. Address Underserved/Limited Resource audiences.

Progress: A brochure titled "Low-Cost Conservation Practices" has been produced and is being distributed. Five workshops/education programs serving the target audience are currently being scheduled.

7. Crop nutrient and manure management continuing education.

Progress: Brochures and presentations are being prepared on elements of a crop nutrient and manure management plan, and on management of sensitive features in fields. Collaboration with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is continuing to assure continuity among NRCS standards, UM Extension recommendations, and MPCA feedlot rules.

#### **Interagency Collaboration:**

The EQIP Education partnership has served as a focal point for interagency discussion and collaboration in several areas. Crop nutrient and manure management planning education has required collaboration on plan guidelines and standards among staff of Extension, NRCS, MPCA and MDA. Staff of all four agencies have participated in presenting the regional workshops attended by agricultural producers, consultants, SWCD staff, and other professionals, so that one message is heard from all.

#### **EQIP Education Staffing:**

##### Regional Coordinators:

Kevin Blanchet, UM Extension, SE (EQIP Education funds). 651-480-7739  
Jodi DeJong, UM Extension, NW (Extension matching funds). 320-589-1711  
Kamal Alsharif, UM Extension/BWSR, NE 218-723-2350  
Derek Fisher, BWSR/Extension, SW 507-359-6090



NRCS State Staff:

Paul Flynn, EQIP Manager

Tim Koehler, Asst. State Conservationist

Jeff St. Ores, EQIP, Water Quality Specialist

Jeff King, Nutrient Management Specialist

Steve Lutes, Nutrient Management Specialist

Richard Giles, Nutrient Management Specialist

Howard Moechnig, Grazing Management Specialist

Extension State Staff:

Jim Anderson, Dept. Soil, Water, & Climate, Extension Project Manager

Les Everett, Dept. Soil, Water, & Climate, EQIP Education Coordinator 612-625-6751

State, regional, and county-based Extension staff are assisting with development of planning guidelines, technical standards, educational materials development, and workshop delivery.

**Web Site:** Information about Minnesota EQIP Education can be found at <http://wrc.coafes.umn.edu/EQIP/index.html>